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ABSTRACT

A colloquy, "New-style Primary Education: Achievements and Prospects," was held in Brussels by the Ministry of Education of The Dutch-speaking sector of Belgium. In the first section of this report, the colloquy is viewed in the contexts of the New-style Primary Education (VLO) project of the Ministry of National Education, and the Innovation in Primary Education, Project No. 8, of the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Cooperation. Objectives of the colloquy were to report on key ideas of the VLO project, provide information on recent developments in the project, and clarify ways in which objectives of the project could be given concrete form in schools. The program of the colloquy is reproduced in Section II. Lectures are summarized in part III. The lectures provide background information on: (1) the VLO project; (2) project implementation, points of controversy, the project's future, and areas needing improvement; (3) support for the management of educational innovation; (4) the VLO project in the international context of innovation movements; (5) external assessment of the VLO project; (6) conditions for continuing the project; (7) objectives and methods of the project; and (8) objectives of the colloquy. Conclusions of the general rapporteur point out the colloquy's strong and weak points. The name and affiliation of each of the 210 participants are listed. (RH)

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Project No. 8 of the CDCC
"Innovation in primary education"

Dissemination of the project's findings

5th National Seminar:
Dutch-speaking Belgium - Brussels, 17-18 June 1988

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School Education Division

Strasbourg 1989

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The CDCC's Project No. 8
"Innovation in Primary Education"

DISSEMINATION OF THE PROJECT'S FINDINGS
5th NATIONAL SEMINAR:

DUTCH-SPEAKING BELGIUM

Seminar convened within the framework of the Colloquy on
"The VLO Project: innovation in elementary education:
progress and future prospects"

BRUSSELS, 17 and 18 June 1988

Report written by Georges Baert
Inspecteur honoraire
Président du Groupe de Projet No. 8

The points of view expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect
those of the Council for Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION (CDCC)
School Education Division

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Colloquy "New-style primary education: achievements and prospects", held in Brussels by the Ministry of Education of the Dutch-speaking sector of Belgium on 17 and 18 June 1988, was instigated by the COB (Commissie Onderwijsvernieuwing Basisschool - New-style Primary Education Committee). It is to be seen as a stage in the development of the VLO Project (VLO = Vernieuwd Lager Onderwijs - new-style primary education) and also in a broader context, namely that of Project No. 8 of the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC), "Innovation in primary education". The purpose of the colloquy was in part to disseminate the results of Project No. 8 (CDCC Programme of Activities for 1988, IV.31.1). It is therefore interesting to situate it in the context of the VLO Project on the one hand and the CDCC Project No. 8, "Innovation in primary education", on the other.

1. The colloquy in the context of the VLO Project

The idea of a project for the reform of primary education dates back to March 1972, when the Minister of National Education at the time, Mr Willy CLAES, expressed his intentions regarding a reorientation of primary and nursery education in the course of a week devoted to education.

After over a year of preparation, the VLO Project was set up on 1 September 1973, in accordance with a strategy approved by the authorities responsible for the three levels involved (the state, the municipalities and private education).

We may identify two basic ideas underlying this strategy:

1. From the outset, it was recommended that innovation should be backed up by professional support and guidance;
2. Although in its initial phase the VLO Project involved only a small number of schools (9), it was considered absolutely imperative to devise a strategy and guidelines aimed at the entire primary and nursery school teaching profession.

(At the end of the school year 1987-88, 480 schools, 9,735 teachers and 140,000 children were directly involved in the VLO Project, ie 21% of teachers and pupils in primary education in the Flemish community of Belgium.)

Various phases in the innovation process - orientation, planning, development, assessment and extension - were worked out by an ad hoc committee.

The orientation phase in particular was characterised by two activities:

1. Detection and discussion of shortcomings in the operation of the primary school as it was, in other words trying to answer the question: "Why a VLO Project?" Discussion and suggestion of necessary changes and hence analysis of the aims of innovation.
2. Stimulation of awareness of shortcomings (consciousness-raising) and subsequently of desirable changes (encounter with innovation).

During the orientation phase, and more particularly during the analysis of the situation, the essential aims of innovation began to emerge via the following three simultaneous objectives:

- to achieve all-round, balanced and continuous development of the child's personality (integration, artistic creativity training, flexible organisation of activities);
- to foster the development of the child's individual identity (by means of education with a world outlook, better school-family co-operation, integration of migrant workers' children);
- to provide guidance at both nursery and primary level so as to avoid hiatuses in the development and learning process.

The emphasis was placed as much on processes as on contents, with the twofold concern to extend the experiments and increase their effectiveness. However, transfer pure and simple is not possible; each school has a particular concept of innovation bound up with the school team, interactions between the various participants in the educational community, priorities selected and resources available.

A mechanism made up of pilot schools, support teams and a co-ordinating group was set up to help implement the project.

The keystone of the strategy was the co-ordinating group, which comprised representatives of primary and secondary education, teacher training, universities, psycho-medico-social (PMS) centres, the administration, the organisation authorities, parents' associations and teachers' unions. The role of this co-ordinating group was to monitor the progress of the VLO Project and participate actively through the drafting of recommendations addressed to the central authority, consideration of proposals from the support teams and initiatives for dissemination of the VLO Project results.

At the start of the school year 1976-77, the co-ordinating group was renamed the COB (Commissie Onderwijsvernieuwing Basisschool - New-style Primary Education Committee) and was placed under the chairmanship of the Inspector General for Primary Education. The COB holds 6 or 7 meetings a year, but there are a number of working groups which prepare reports at its request.

At its meeting of 17 March 1987, the COB agreed on the principle of a colloquy on the VLO Project. In June 1987, it received the go-ahead from the Minister of Education, who also approved a subsidy of 450,000 Belgian francs. At the meeting held on 15 December 1987, the members of the COB agreed on a detailed proposal for the colloquy. An ad hoc working group was set up which met three times (7 January 1988, 10 February 1988 and 29 April 1988).

The idea of a colloquy on new-style primary education was in line with the principles of the VLO Project, which remains a highly specific initiative geared to the translation into practical terms of concerns relating to innovation in primary education. Consultation between the various education systems was rigorously observed from the outset of the VLO Project. The contents and application of the VLO Project were subjected to regular review in order to provide the authorities with the elements they required to take appropriate decisions for the development of the project.

It was also vital to keep all those involved in primary education (teachers, parents, organising authorities) informed.

In this context, the colloquy aimed to

- provide up-to-date information on the VLO Project;
- introduce those concerned to the general idea of innovation;
- provide an opportunity for all those involved to consider together the future progress of the VLO Project;

It was decided that the colloquy would take place over two days and have as its target groups:

1. Decision-makers, educationists, heads of teacher training institutions

For these groups, the colloquy would put forward a scientific analysis of new-style primary education and provide information on how to manage and support the innovative process

2. Participants in educational communities at local level

For this group, the colloquy would provide very concrete information on the VLO Project and create awareness of the need to innovate. It was thus an invitation to become involved.

On the first day, 270 participants were expected. These fell into two categories:

- Guests: members of the Ministerial cabinet
active members of the COB
members of the support teams (central and regional)
educationists
political representatives serving on various
education-related parliamentary committees
- Others: officials from each education system
directors of psycho-medico-social centres
representatives of parents' organisations
representatives of teachers' unions
representatives of universities
members of the central administration
members of the inspectorates for the various levels
of education.

Some thousand people were expected on the second day, but this figure proved too optimistic. On 18 June 1988, 600 people were present in the main hall of the Palais des Congrès.

2. The colloquy in the context of Project No. 8 of the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC)

From the start of Project No. 8, when the Vaduz (Liechtenstein) conference was held, from 9 to 12 November 1982, there was a close link between Project No. 8 and the VLO Project. The representative of Belgium at this conference, Georges Baert, was a member of the COB and had directly contributed to the conception of the VLO Project and subsequently to its implementation.

The results of the Vaduz conference on "Primary education in Western Europe: aims, problems and trends" were in line with the objectives of the VLO Project. The fact that Project No. 8 focused on innovation in primary education further strengthened the links between the two projects. It was therefore quite natural that, within the framework of Project No. 8, a symposium should be organised in Han-sur-Lesse (17-21 October 1983) on "Innovation in primary education in Western Europe".

A case study "School-based review as an introduction strategy for the new-style education (VLO) project in Belgium" and a contribution by G Baert (renewed primary school: the experience of Belgium) to the 27th Council of Europe Teachers' Seminar on "The role of the teacher in innovation" (Donaueschingen, 20-25 May 1985) forged conclusive links between the two projects.

The COB members were kept regularly informed on Project No. 8 by the Dutch-speaking representative of Belgium within the Project Group.

It was logical, then, that a member of Project Group No. 8 should be asked to address the colloquy about the place occupied by the VLO Project in the international context of innovation movements, and Drs Gerard H van den Hoven (Netherlands) agreed to lecture on this theme: for health reasons, the lecture was delivered by one of his colleagues at the Education Ministry, Mr J Swiers.

Mr G Baert was appointed General Rapporteur of the colloquy by the Council of Europe.

II. PROGRAMME OF THE COLLOQUY

Friday 17 June 1988

- 9 am: Welcome
- 10 am: Opening of the colloquy by Mr L POLLENTIER, Chairman of the New-style Primary Education Committee (COB)
- 10.20 am: Focus on the VLO Project. Developments and prospects
Lecture by Mr G BAERT, Honorary principal inspector
- 10.05 am: General discussion
- 11.25 am: Innovation guidance: external and internal support
Lecture by Mrs C VAN DER PERRE, Doctor of Educational Sciences, Higher Institute of Educational Science, Hasselt
- 12.10 pm: General discussion
- 12.30 pm: Break for lunch
- 2.15 pm: The VLO Project in the international context of innovation movements

Lecture prepared by Drs G H VAN DEN HOVEN, Deputy Director General of Primary Education (Netherlands), and presented by Mr J SWIERS, Director of the innovation section, Primary Education Department (Netherlands)

3 pm: The VLO Project and external assessment
Lecture by Dr W JANSEN, Free University of Brussels

3.40 pm: General discussion

4 pm: Concluding address by Mr Luc VAN DEN BOSSCHE, State
Secretary for Education (Dutch-speaking sector)
Moderator of general discussions: Dr. Johan HEENE, State
University of Ghent.

Saturday 18 June 1988

9 am: Welcome

(Information workshops in the Astrid Hall accessible until
9.45 am)

10 am: Opening address by Mr Luc VAN DEN BOSSCHE, State Secretary
for Education (Dutch-speaking sector)

10.15 am: General introduction: The VLO Project, objectives and
methods by Mr J DEPOORTERE, delegate of the support teams of
the three education systems

10.30 am: Achieving the objective of all-round, balanced and
continuous development of the child's personality

Presentation by a team from the state education system

11.10 am: Musical interlude

11.20 am: Achieving the objective of individualisation

Presentation by a team from the municipal education system

12 noon: Musical interlude

12.10 pm: Achieving the objective of creating an educational community
with a world outlook

Presentation by a team from the private education system

1 pm: Closure of the colloquy on a musical note

(Information workshops accessible from 1.15 to 3 pm)

III. LECTURES

1. Opening of colloquy by Mr L Pollentier

The VLO Project was launched in 1973 and at the start only nine
schools took part with a few dozen teachers and several hundreds of
children.

Today, the project covers 480 schools, some 10,000 teachers and
140,000 pupils, representing 21% of the staff and pupils of primary
and nursery schools in the Flemish community of Belgium.

21% after 12 years of VLO ... an impressive figure? Is it not rather on the meagre side? Sceptics will rapidly calculate that we shall have to wait till the year 2050 to see the VLO Project applied throughout Flanders!

A few observations are called for:

- Firstly: must we really achieve 100%? It was decided when the project was launched that there would be no obligation to participate.
- Secondly, there was never any dramatic extension, as the staffing resources for optimal support were not available.
- Thirdly, the 250 schools are well into the preparation phase and will be joining the VLO Project in the very near future.

These observations prompt a number of questions.

- How has the VLO Project progressed?

Have there been moments of stagnation, not to say regression or discouragement, or has there been new momentum? Have there been mistakes?

- What is the current situation?

Does new-style primary education exist and is it perceived and recognised as such? Or do we find too much diversity and over-partial emphases?

- What will happen in the future when the project is joined by 250 schools whose teachers and pupils are also anxious to benefit from the improved quality of education that VLO is intended to bring about?

These are some of the aspects of the VLO Project which will be discussed this morning. Some observations will undoubtedly interest the State Secretary for Education, who will be represented here by a number of his colleagues, and we await with interest the address by Mr Luc van den Bossche, State Secretary, at the end of this first day of the colloquy.

It is obvious that innovation in primary education is not restricted to the VLO Project. Many schools which have not yet joined the project have nevertheless launched very successful innovative initiatives.

We are also interested in changes taking place abroad:

- Are we on the same wavelength as innovator in other countries?

Are there interesting ideas which have not been picked up by the VLO Project?

- What can we learn from these innovations abroad?

Are people interested in our innovation and how do they judge it?

These relations between the VLO Project and innovations abroad will be examined this afternoon.

What is the effect of innovations on pupils? Does the quality of teaching really improve? Have positive results been noted and if so how?

The problem of assessment interests us greatly and will also be considered this afternoon. We shall probably learn whether the assessments have influenced official decisions and the behaviour of the support teams.

The VLO Project demands much effort on the part of many people and costs a considerable amount of money: too much for some, not enough for others.

This raises a pertinent question: was innovation in primary and nursery education, channelled into the VLO Project, really necessary? The question is all the more pertinent as even 15 years ago, our nursery education was considered among the best in the world and there were no real problems in primary education. Did anything really need to be changed? Posing the question was enough to unleash a wave of expectations, which were not specific to Flanders or to Belgium, but which were present in the cultural world of western Europe and everywhere gave rise to innovation in, among other fields, primary and nursery education.

Innovation in primary and nursery education was INEVITABLE and the priorities were foreseeable. The VLO Project is not the miracle solution, but, as the colloquy will show, it has been one of the key factors, probably the most valuable, in large-scale innovation of primary and nursery education in Flanders.

This colloquy is well timed: it was absolutely necessary to examine the VLO Project in depth. Our proceedings will be followed in their entirety by representatives of educational authorities. Shortly, at the end of this opening day, we shall probably be able to hear their first reactions and perhaps also have news of management intentions which will be important for the future of the VLO Project.

2. Lecture by Mr G Baert "Focus on the VLO Project - Developments and prospects"

- Implementation of the VLO Project

- * How the VLO Project was launched and the general context in which it must be viewed?
- * How the VLO Project has developed
- * The main stages in the project
- * The current situation.

- Some (critical) observations

- * The relevant aspects of VLO
 - . the idea of the new-style "basic" school

- . the idea of the relative autonomy of the school
- . the idea of the educational community with emphasis on the school team and characterised by consultation and participation
- . an initiative which concerns all the education systems
- . a specific support structure
- . external scientific assessment
- . the COB (Commissie Onderwijsvernieuwing Basisschool - New-style Primary Education Committee)
- * The way the VLO Project is perceived by the various participants in educational communities (authorities, children, teachers, parents, staff of psycho-medico-social centres) and other organisations in the world of education (support teams, inspectorates, education officials)
- * Relations between the education authorities' decisions and the results of the VLO Project
- * Points of controversy:
 - . Is the VLO Project a concept imposed from the outside or did it grow out of a real need in education?
 - . Is VLO really a stimulus to innovation or is it rather a way of channelling existing innovations?
 - . Is VLO a one-off phenomenon with a limited time span, or has it sowed the seeds of the idea and realisation of a constantly self-innovating school?
 - . Does VLO give rise to polarisation in primary and nursery education or has it brought about an enriching diversity at this level of education?
 - . Is VLO a structural phenomenon in which processes prevail over contents or is it an overall and total innovation process?
 - . Is VLO really child-oriented or is it rather focused on a change of direction in the organisation of schools?

- The future of the VLO Project

Are the VLO initial objectives still valid today and will they remain so tomorrow?

The VLO Project will have to be organised on the basis of:

- . basic education for each individual
- . continuous education
- . extension of the scope of basic (primary and nursery) education.

- Conclusions

In spite of teachers' laudable efforts both within the framework of VLO and on an individual basis, and despite the efforts of the authorities, changes in schools undoubtedly fail - sometimes significantly - to keep pace with changes in society.

There is resistance at the various levels of organisation, among different groups of active participants, affecting various fields of education.

The VLO Project has shown that innovation in primary and nursery education can be organised in a systematic way without impinging on the autonomy of schools and without interfering with the creativity of educational communities.

However, the VLO Project will have to make a serious effort in five areas:

- . curricula
- . content assessment
- . teacher training
- . co-ordination of the various forms of support
- . dissemination of information on innovations.

3. Lecture by Mrs C van der Perre "Innovation guidance: external and internal support"

- Management of innovation at local level - internal support

- * The relative autonomy of the school: a condition for the implementation of the VLO Project as a large-scale innovative process
 - . the significance and role of the educational community
 - . the task of the local support teams
 - . the internal co-ordinator: school head, a teacher, a nucleus of teachers
 - . the task of the internal co-ordinator
- * Relative autonomy: tension between local innovation management and central management
- * What conditions are necessary to the effective functioning of local innovation management?

- Innovation management at local level - external support

- * Importance of external support
 - . Description of the assignment and qualifications of the external co-ordinator

- external support: different forms of action in various organisations
 - Synchronisation, co-ordination and complementarity in the provision of support
 - + at different levels
 - + during different phases of the process
 - + depending on specific needs (content of teaching, internal organisation of school)
 - * What conditions are required for effective operation of external support?
- Co-operation and co-ordination between internal and external support
 - Supply and demand
 - Various forms of co-operation
 - Conditions
- Initial and in-service training of internal and external co-ordinators
 - Recruitment of co-ordinators
 - In-service training initiatives for head teachers and external co-ordinators
 - A training institute:
 - + expert co-ordinators
 - + co-ordination of different resources
 - + analysis of training needs.
- 4. Lecture prepared by Drs G H van den Hoven (and given by Mr J Swiers)
"The VLO Project in the international context of innovation movements"
 - The European context
 - * The position of the Flemish community and developments in primary and nursery education
 - * Belgium and the Netherlands as front-runners?
 - * Diversity of innovations in the various member states of the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC): diversity in a single context!
 - The content of the VLO Project
 - * Fixed objectives or ones which evolve on the basis of experience?
 - * Do the objectives of VLO and trends in other member states have points in common?

- * Does the VLO Project primarily aim at a reorientation of teaching in learning situations?

What is discovered on this subject in a European context?

- Implementation of the VLO Project

- * What type of innovation strategy is obligatory in the VLO Project?

What relationship is there with other European experiments?

- * What innovation instruments are applied in the project?

What are the findings of identical experiments in other projects?

- * Are problems in striking a balance between national and local efforts and between the various education systems specific to the Belgian situation?

- * What international experiments are of significance for the VLO Project?

5. Lecture by Dr W Jansen "The VLO Project and external assessment"

- External assessment of the VLO Project

The essence of the VLO Project lies in its approach to innovative processes. Consequently, external assessment is primarily the assessment of these processes.

In 1979, the authorities approved an assessment research project and assigned the State University of Ghent and the Catholic University of Louvain to carry it out.

The initial results suggested a close link between the way innovation is put into effect and the situation of a particular school. The opinions passed on to the central authority by the COB take these results into account and recommend support focusing on schools' specific problems. This is why since 1982-1983 the school-based review (self-assessment) system has been applied as a method for launching an education innovation project.

The results have been confirmed by subsequent research, which has also emphasised the marked influence a school's particular situation has on its innovation project.

In 1983-84, on the COB's advice, the Minister of Education approved two new research projects: the Catholic University of Louvain to assess the school-based review procedure and the State University of Ghent the effect of innovation (the VLO Project) on pupil behaviour.

- General problems of research on innovations

Thirty years ago, the principal object of assessment was pupil performance. At the end of the 1950s, there was growing interest in measuring the effects of syllabuses. At that time, assessment was

seen as a tool to help education officials take appropriate decisions. The information collected concerned both the development (process assessment) and effects (product assessment) of a course.

This two-fold assessment technique is to be found in recent research on innovations in connection first, with school improvement in organisational terms, and second, with school effectiveness in terms of performance.

- Questions on external assessment of the VLO Project

- * Have we not been (too) slow in assessing the effect?

Is it really necessary to wait until an innovation is fully operational before assessing its effects? Who can say exactly when an innovation becomes fully operational?

What are the criteria?

Who decides what will be assessed?

Are there precise pointers?

- * What are - in general - the criteria for assessment?

Has enough thought been given to the multiplicity of learning effects?

Who has ultimate responsibility for defining these criteria?

Has action been taken on the relations between conditions and effects?

Has enough emphasis been put on the problems approach in research?

- * Is enough thought given to analysis of the relations between the observed effects and the various aspects of the innovation put into effect?

Is there sufficient co-operation between the various assessment teams?

What use is made by the central authorities of the assessment teams' findings? What is the relationship between research and practice?

6. Concluding address of the first day of the colloquy by Mr Van den Bossche, State Secretary for Education

In his introduction, the State Secretary referred to the analysis made by Mr L Pollentier, COB Chairman, and noted that the very cautious advance of the VLO Project should encourage an in depth examination of this large-scale innovation, with due respect for the commitment and enthusiasm of those who had contributed to its implementation.

When an innovation project needed 15 years to reach 20% of schools, there was a great danger of creating an "institutionalised experiment". At that stage, the innovation itself needed a new approach.

There had probably been too much reliance on spontaneity at classroom level and the emphasis on the specific character of each school was in danger of becoming an obstacle to overall assessment.

It was time to move on to very concrete and clearly comprehensible objectives and not only an assessment of the implementation of the innovation but also an assessment of its effects were accordingly needed.

The VLO Project must be continued, but on certain conditions:

- very clear indications on the part of the central authority
- an assessment of its effects and implementation
- democratisation of primary and nursery education, which implied more attention to children with learning difficulties and children from deprived socio-cultural backgrounds
- development of curricula and learning methods
- appropriate teacher training

In conclusion, the State Secretary said once more how much he valued what had been achieved by the VLO Project; primary and nursery education were vital both for the child's subsequent school career and for his success in life.

7. Opening speech of the second day of the colloquy by
Mr Luc Van den Bossche, State Secretary for Education

In his opening speech, the State Secretary reiterated the ideas expressed in his closing address the previous day, but tailored his remarks to the audience, which was made up of head teachers, teachers and parents of pupils.

He particularly emphasised the concrete problems which presented members of an educational community with a veritable challenge. The assistance provided by the support teams - members of which were also present - must be geared to these concrete problems.

He was in favour of the creation of a data bank for the storage of curricula, learning methods, audio-visual resources, assessment results and a variety of models for the organisation of an educational community.

Schools and teachers must have at their disposal the means needed to create the model school they had planned. This would require structural changes and adjustments to regulations.

A change of structures was not sufficient, but it was sometimes a necessary step. Innovation depended particularly on the contribution of teachers, and it was high time the initial training of future teachers and in-service training of teachers were adapted.

In spite of many reports, interesting symposia and well-prepared study days, the VLO Project was still insufficiently well known and widespread. The dissemination of information on new-style primary education must henceforth become a major preoccupation.

To conclude, the State Secretary emphasised the importance of teachers, not only in primary and nursery education but at every level of the education system. He said that he would be pleased to learn how they viewed innovation in general and the VLO Project in particular, and what they expected from them.

8. Introduction to the work of the second day of the colloquy by Mr J Depoortere, Representative of the support teams

It was an ambitious task to try to fulfil two major expectations in one day between 10 in the morning and 3 in the afternoon:

- firstly to sketch a clear and precise picture of the VLO Project;
- secondly to provide very concrete information about school reality.

To fulfil the first expectation, arrangements were made for three teams to present the objectives of the VLO Project, each made up of six to eight representatives of the educational community: parents, teachers (nursery and primary) head teachers, members of PMS centres and members of regional support teams. Mr Depoortere pointed out that to help in achieving the second objective of the day, namely replying to concrete questions on innovation, information workshops had been set up in the Astrid Hall.

They did not represent a real working school, but the judicious choice of workshops reflected the VLO Project fairly well. Here, replies were also given to concrete questions.

He saw the VLO Project as a challenge to each educational community. At first, the broad outlines had been thought out for a new-style primary and nursery school, and the way to achieve it. Gradually, the idea of "the characteristics of the VLO Project" had been introduced, based on the following objectives and expectations:

- all-round and continuous development of pupils
- individual attention for each pupil, taking his specific identity into account
- improved co-operation between schools and the local community.

These fairly general and therefore not very precise objectives were the essence of the VLO Project. The achievement of these objectives in practice took the form of a wide variety of school activities. It was not an easy task but it was the challenge to be met by each school taking part in the VLO Project and one which increased the chances of improving the quality of education.

But the road leading from dreams to action was long and strewn with pitfalls. Acceptance of the objectives did not automatically mean their achievement. Constant thought, systematic endeavours, regular assessment of the concrete needs and specific resources of

each educational community and the possibility of calling upon external support were the key elements for achievement of the objectives. And the VLO project was only a support structure. It did not specify the path to be followed. Indeed, there was no well-defined path. It was by a variety of paths that an educational community, in consultation with other communities and with the support of external bodies, could manage to give substance to its own innovation.

Innovation per se was not the goal but through innovation, an attempt was being made to improve the quality of education for the benefit of children.

9. In his final address, Mr L Pollentier, summing up, said that the objectives of the colloquy had been:

- to report on the key ideas of the VLO Project and the reasons behind them;
- to provide information on recent developments in the VLO Project;
- to clarify the way in which the objectives of the VLO Project could be given concrete form in schools and classrooms.

Each of the participants would evaluate the results of this colloquy in his own way.

Mr L Pollentier concluded by thanking those who had contributed to the success of the colloquy; very special thanks were due to the children who had provided the music.

He urged all participants to ensure that the colloquy received the attention it deserved.

IV. CONCLUSIONS OF THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR

Over the 15 years of its existence, the VLO Project has been subjected to critical public examination on several occasions at study days, colloquies and conferences.

The most important of these events were, in chronological order:

- 1 September 1973 (Brussels): Colloquy on the VLO Project organised by the Lodevijk de Raet Foundation.
- 4 November 1978 (Antwerp): Colloquy on "Innovation in primary and nursery education in the Netherlands and Flanders", organised by the ANV (Algemeen-Nederlands Verbond)
- 30 August 1980 (Brussels): Colloquy on the VLO Project organised by the Lodevijk de Raet Foundation.
- 8 November 1980 (Antwerp): Colloquy on "In-service training in primary and nursery education in the Netherlands and Flanders" organised by the General Commissariat of the "1980 National Celebrations" Committee (on the occasion of Belgium's 150th anniversary).

The Colloquy on 17 and 18 June 1988 was the first to be organised by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the COB. The reasons for this initiative on the part of the authorities are set out in the introduction to this report.

To a very large extent, the colloquy lived up to expectations: the lectures provided the necessary information, which held no surprises for participants on the first day but which stimulated thought and a critical approach to the VLO Project.

The lecture prepared by Mr Gerard van den Hoven aroused keen interest. The light shed on the relationship between the VLO Project and innovative trends in other countries and particularly Project No. 8 of the Council of Europe's CDCC, suggested undoubted parallels between the VLO Project and Project No. 8 (Innovation in primary education). The recommendations in the final report of Project No. 8 thus constitute direct support for the VLO Project.

In spite of the speakers' contributions, the participants said little during plenary discussions. The reason for the scarcity of questions asked was probably lack of time. Approximately 20 minutes of plenary discussion for each lecture were not enough, particularly for the first introduction, which lasted over 50 minutes.

The presentation of the VLO Project by the representatives of the three education systems was very lively and with participants intervening actively, no doubt in part because of the direct connection with school practice.

The information workshops made a decisive contribution to the colloquy's success, particularly on the second day. They helped to spread a better knowledge of what goes on in the VLO schools.

The colloquy focused clearly on the VLO Project's future. It was plainly and honestly stated that the VLO Project was not suitable for general application throughout nursery and primary education, which does not mean, however, that VLO ideas cannot be applied in such schools as approve of them.

In order to achieve this, those in charge of innovation must provide specially designed external support for those schools which need it.

Moreover, the central authority must issue very precise guidelines on curricula and the standards which must be reached at the end of primary education.

At the same time, it is necessary to draw up the professional profile of nursery and primary school teachers, head teachers and the staff of support teams in primary education. It is also necessary to agree on the organisation of appropriate training for all these categories of teachers.

These concerns are in line with the conclusions and recommendations of the General Rapporteur of Project No. 8 on the occasion of the presentation of the results of the project at the 54th session of the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) of the Council of Europe, which took place in Strasbourg from 21 to 24 June 1988.

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